

they have been experts at stalling everything. That is what they are going to do again today.

But we are going to go ahead and vote on this tonight, and we are going to vote on it again Wednesday. There will be no amendments. It is not a difficult issue. You are either for campaign spending reform or not. So my Republican colleagues can stall for time. We are going to be very patient. We are going to see if there is a single Republican who believes an election in America today should be determined by how much money you have. That is what this vote is all about.

I am going to move this legislation forward regardless of any Republican obstruction because this issue is important. Simply put, this constitutional amendment is what we need to bring back sanity to elections and restore Americans' confidence in our democracy. We must overturn the status quo created by the Supreme Court and instead put in place a system that works for all Americans, not just the richest of the rich.

It is such a shame what this Republican-driven tea party has done in Congress to try to stop everything. Virtually everything is a filibuster. I do not know how much longer the American people are going to put up with it. These are artificial numbers anyway. Should not we be a democracy? We are not because everything in this Senate requires 60 votes. That is not the way of the Founding Fathers. And, of course, a number of the Founding Fathers were from the Presiding Officer's State. None from Nevada; we were not a State. But the Founding Fathers must be turning over in their graves. They must be looking down at this and saying: What in the world are they doing to our country?

We must overturn the status quo. This is what the entire issue boils down to: whether our democracy, as President Lincoln said, is a "government of the people, by the people and for the people." That is what Lincoln said, and we know that is what he meant—or as we have it today: a government of the rich, by the rich, and exclusively for the rich.

Is America for sale? The American people want change. They want their place in government to be protected. The constitutional amendment before the Senate protects working families. It protects Americans. It protects their voice and participation in government because our voice—not the wealth of a few—is the very essence of American democracy.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. President, would the Chair announce the business of this afternoon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be

in a period of morning business until 5:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

Who yields time?

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are currently in a period of morning business.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I know we are going to hold our first vote relevant to S.J. Res. 19 later today, so let me speak about that for a few minutes. It is a constitutional amendment. It is something rare here, but this would restore to Congress and the States the authority to set reasonable limits on contributions and expenditures in our elections. The amendment would also allow Congress and the States to distinguish between natural persons and corporations when shaping legislation regarding the financing of elections.

Both the States and the national government have exercised this power for a long time in a responsible way until a narrow majority of Supreme Court justices ignored history, and, worse than that, they ignored the Court's own precedent. These Court opinions have now eviscerated campaign finance laws, and they have invited corruption into our political system. If we do not respond, we will continue on a path back to the days when only the wealthy few had access to our government. If we do not respond, corruption will flourish and hard-working Americans will lose any remaining faith they have in their elected officials. So I believe it is time to restore some sanity to our campaign finance laws but also to restore the true meaning and intent of the First Amendment.

I came to the Senate in January 1975, in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Americans were voicing concerns about the integrity and honesty of their elected leaders. They were concerned about the corrupting influence of anonymous money flowing into elections. The public's confidence in our democratic institutions was at a low point, so Congress passed the 1976 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act. As a freshman Senator—in fact, the junior most Member of the Senate—I was proud to vote for this law.

Decades later Democrats and Republicans again came together in 2002 to pass the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act. It targeted the use of soft money donations and the unlimited spending that could be done anonymously, used to finance attack ads before an election. Just as we did in the wake of Watergate, our bipartisan effort recognized the need to pass important campaign finance reforms to

protect our democracy from corruption and to preserve access to our popular democracy.

But it appears today that many of our elected officials and a narrow majority of the U.S. Supreme Court no longer even acknowledge the corrosive influence of unfettered, anonymous money flowing in to fund our elections. Anonymous money—somebody can try to buy an election, and they do not even have to put their fingerprints on it. They just spend the money. They can say it is the Committee to Bring Honesty and Openness to Government even though it might be funded by a group who wants just the opposite.

Over the last decade a slim majority of the Supreme Court has issued one dreadful campaign finance decision after another. In fact, in 2010, in a 5-to-4 ruling—five Republicans on the Supreme Court—in *Citizens United*, the Court reversed a century of precedent by declaring that corporations have a First Amendment right to spend endlessly to finance and influence elections. In effect, they said corporations were people. I have said this many times before, and sometimes people chuckle, but stop and think about it. This country elected General Eisenhower as President. If you really listen to what the Supreme Court said, we could elect General Electric to be President or General Motors to be President.

In this past year the same five Justices held that aggregate limits on campaign contributions are now somehow a violation of the First Amendment. In other words, if you are running in a local election somewhere where people would normally spend \$300 or \$400, but it is critical because that local board may decide what the tax policy of a big corporation might be in that community, they could say: OK, people running the board are going to spend \$300 or \$400 each. We will just put \$1 million in to elect a different board that will give us a \$10 million tax break.

The Court's radical reinterpretation of the First Amendment contradicts the principles of freedom, equality, and self-government upon which this Nation was founded. The consequence of the Court's opinions is that a small, tiny minority of very wealthy individuals and special interests are drowning out the voices of hard-working Americans and skewing our electoral process. What they are saying is: I have millions of dollars. I have a voice in elections. You? You are just an average hard-working man or woman, and you do not have any voice.

The expressed justification for time-honored campaign finance laws has been a genuine concern about the corrupting influence of money in politics. But despite this well-founded concern, Justice Kennedy's opinion in *Citizens United* nonsensically confined corruption to mean only quid pro quo corruption or bribery. In doing so, these five Justices discarded what our very